



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Elliot Krieger, Media Relations – (401) 222-4600 ext. 2182, or 749-0252

Embargo until: Monday, July 12, 2004

Education Commissioner Orders Reconstitution of Hope High School McWalters says he may be forced to close the school in 2005

Education Commissioner Peter McWalters today issued to the Providence School Department an “order of reconstitution” regarding Hope High School.

The order mandates that the school district submit to him, by August 10th, a Corrective Action Plan to address numerous deficiencies in the high school. McWalters also ordered that he be given approval authority over the schedule and the budget for the school. He said that he has frozen the \$600,000 in state funds designated for the school pending his approval of the plan and the overall budget.

In addition, he issued an “order to show cause,” in which the district must demonstrate to him, at a hearing that has not yet been scheduled, why he should not close the school in September 2005.

“I am taking these actions today because I want to ensure that the reform efforts underway at Hope High School are not derailed,” McWalters said. “Over the course of the past two years, Hope has been reorganized into three small learning communities, and that has changed the climate at the school. I have been troubled, however, that circumstances have frustrated the effort to arrive at clear organizational plans, budgets, and schedules for these small learning communities. I want to guarantee that these small learning communities continue in operation this fall and in future years, with staff committed to the process of school reform.”

Today’s actions come under the commissioner’s authority in state law to intervene in schools that repeatedly miss their annual performance goals, a process known as “progressive support and intervention.” Under McWalters’s leadership, the state intervened in Hope High School two years ago. McWalters at that time mandated that, under new leadership, the school be reorganized into small learning communities. Each small learning community was to have the authority to hire its own staff, which is known as “site-based management.”

Though three small learning communities went into operation last September at Hope High School, none of the three learning communities developed its own site-based management plan for the commissioner’s approval.

-more-

In the “order of reconstitution” submitted today, McWalters mandated that the three small learning communities shall each “have the authority to interview and hire staff,” which means that teachers will be interviewed for jobs at Hope High School rather than being placed there because of seniority rights.

McWalters also ordered that the Providence School District address numerous deficiencies and requirements, notably:

- Guaranteeing that each small learning community has the authority to select teachers and assign them based on student need
- Providing standards-based instruction in each small learning community
- Offering instructional programs beyond the traditional school day
- Establishing an advisory structure for the students
- Ensuring adequate professional-development and common-planning time for the staff
- Guaranteeing meaningful student, parent, and community participation in the governance of the three small learning communities
- Making explicit each teacher’s commitment to these principles as a condition for remaining employed at the school.

If these mandates are not met, McWalters said in his “order to show cause” that he may close the school and reopen the facility in September 2005 as three new small learning communities, based on criteria that he will establish.

Hope High School was the first school subject to intervention by the R.I. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Under state law (16-7.1-5), the state can take “progressive levels of control” over schools that persistently miss performance targets. The law says that if intervention does not lead to school improvement, “the school shall be reconstituted,” which may involve “restructuring the school’s governance, budget, program, personnel, and/or may include decisions regarding the continued operation of the school.”

These actions under state law are similar to steps outlined in the federal No Child Left Behind Act, but Hope High School is not subject to most provisions of the act because it does not receive federal Title I funds for schools with high rates of poverty.

A complete copy of the commissioner’s five-page order is attached.

Note: Commissioner McWalters will be available for media interviews today (Monday, July 12th), from 3-4 p.m., at his office at the Education Department. Please call Elliot Krieger, at 749-0252, to schedule an interview with the commissioner.

